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For Immediate Release
May 27, 2005

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“Restore Mackinac State Historic Park funding!” proclaims statewide crowd at Town Hall meeting

Mackinac Island – A crowd of area residents, business owners and visitors attended a town hall meeting held earlier today to discuss the potential cuts to Mackinac State Historic Parks in Mackinaw City, Cheboygan and Mackinac Island, announced State Sen. Jason Allen, R-Traverse City.

“This town hall meeting was a wonderful opportunity for residents to voice their concerns about the governor’s proposed budget cuts for the State Parks,” Allen said. “It is evident from the public comment received at the meeting that the funding for Mackinac Island State Park, Forts Mackinac and Michilimackinac and Mill Creek is vital to the hospitality and tourism industries in northern Michigan.”

The Mackinac Island State Park Commission is facing a potential cut of \$1.5 million in general fund dollars under the proposed budget by the governor. The funding the commission receives is used to support and operate Colonial Michilimackinac, Fort Mackinac and Mill Creek.

“I was very pleased with the turnout,” said Rep. Fran Amos, R-Waterford, chair of the House Appropriations, History, Arts and Libraries Subcommittee, which oversees the Mackinac Island State Park Commission budget in the House. “It is apparent from the input we received today that this funding is crucial for the Mackinac Island State Parks and the economic well being of Michigan’s tourism industry.”

A standing room only crowd attended the meeting to share their thoughts and concerns regarding the proposed cuts. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the impact of the proposed cut to the Mackinac Island State Parks and its effect on northern Michigan and the state as a whole.

Residents and visitors alike spoke about the dramatic impact that such a cut would have on what one individual called “The Smithsonian of Michigan.” Business leaders and community members commented on the diverse group of visitors to the area that rely on the state parks ranging from the more than 60,000 school children who come to learn about their state’s history to the upcoming Forbes CEO conference this fall which will bring over 300 of the top executives to Michigan.

“Mackinac Island State Park, Forts Mackinac and Michilimackinac, and Mill Creek bring more than a million visitors to northern Michigan every year and generate more than \$215 million in area spending,” Allen said. “We will keep working to preserve and protect this park system, which serves both as an economic engine to the state and an irreplaceable cultural and historical resource.”

The Mackinac Island State Park Commission has already been cut approximately \$500,000 during the last three years. The \$1.5 million cut proposed by the governor would eliminate all general fund support for the park system. Such a substantial cut would most likely result in a combination of new or substantial increases to fees, building closures and reduced facility maintenance among other cost saving measures.

“I am very grateful for Senator Allen and Representative Amos to have a dialogue first hand with the people that may be affected,” said Mary McGuire Slevin, executive director of the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau. “From a tourism and economic impact perspective, I am very concerned with what could happen to the northern Michigan region should funding for the parks be eliminated. The forts, parks and historic buildings make up an experience, a destination for families coming to the region on vacation.”

Allen worked with the Senate Appropriations Histories, Arts and Libraries Subcommittee to restore the commission’s funding.

Senate Bill 247, the budget bill, is currently before the Senate Appropriations Committee and would still need to move through the House before being presented to the governor.

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